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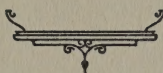
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Community Singing and the Community Chorus

A Manual of Procedure

By
Kenneth S. Clark

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Published by the
NATIONAL BUREAU FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF MUSIC
45 West 45th Street, New York

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May 26, 1942
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COMMUNITY SINGING and the COMMUNITY CHORUS

INASMUCH as this pamphlet covers the scope of community singing rather thoroughly, it will inevitably contain some information that will be an old story to certain of its readers. It is written as if an answer to a most broadly comprehensive question, as follows: How may community singing be started in a given town, successfully maintained and eventually expanded to cover a real community chorus or choral society?

Before answering the above question, we shall try to clarify the background of community singing and state certain facts regarding its past and beliefs as to its future. In the first place, community singing is nothing new. It had existed in various forms long before the World War. It was in the years just preceding the war, however, that community singing was first developed among us as an institution. In the war emergency its unifying and revivifying powers were drawn upon, and it reached a climax of emotional and dramatic impressiveness. Following the demobilization period there was a natural slump in community singing, which was a part of the emotional let-down of that period.

The slackening of the tide of community "sings" caused certain persons to ask, "Did not community singing die out with the war?" That question can be answered with a confident negative. It is true that there are fewer opportunities or necessities for holding big community sings upon a high emotional plane. Probably there is a smaller volume of community singing, or rather a less frequent participation by large masses of people. Nevertheless, community singing is still going on encouragingly, in what its advocates consider to be a more wholesome form. Besides its use on special occasions, it now plays a more spontaneous part in the daily life of the people.

Another question that is sometimes asked is, "Do you consider that informal singing has any artistic value?" That all depends. The worth of community singing, however, is not entirely to be decided by the

answer to, that question. All forms of community music, especially community singing, have a two-fold influence—cultural and social. Besides its purely musical properties, community singing has untold powers for the unification of our people, as expressed in the slogan, "Everybody Neighbors Through Song." Irrespective of the artistic merits of community singing, its sponsors believe that it has served a good purpose if it meets that sociological test. As to its cultural results, these depend upon the skill and ingenuity with which it is administered.

Seeds of Cultural Growth

That skill is to be judged both as to whether the sings are made educational to their public and as to whether they lead to cultural out-growths, such as a community chorus, community orchestra, a series of artists' concerts or other such manifestations.

These and other activities compose what is called community music. The latter term implies not a new form of music, but a new application of it. Community music is any phase of musical activity that gives the people, as a whole, more participation rather than mere spectatorship. The natural entering wedge in any community music program for a city is likely to be the community singing, since that is the most immediate contact to the people and is one form of music-making in which they can join without previous musical training. For this reason those who inaugurate community singing in a town will be wise if they regard it as the foundation upon which a civic music development may later be erected.

So much for the background. Now to answer the first part of our blanket question: How can community singing be started in a given town? The reply is addressed to the hypothetical "you" that has asked the question.

A City-Wide Organization

Somewhere in the early days of the campaign, preferably at the very start, you might bring about the formation of a community music committee or association to direct the movement. The committee should be non-sectarian, non-partisan, and representative of the various groups—musical, social, civic, and religious—such as will take part in a city-wide project of this kind. Your committee may possibly be headed by a general chairman, chosen for his civic influence. Its active chairman should be an efficient organizer who has time to devote himself to the project—preferably a music-loving layman, rather than a professional musician. There should also be an efficient secretary.

No matter what the town, there has probably been community singing in some form. Nevertheless, it is necessary that the value of community

singing be "sold" to the entire population if mass singing is to become a part of the communal life. The best way to sell the idea widely is through one or more big demonstration sings which will make the idea town-talk. The best way of staging such a demonstration sing is generally to make it a part of some general occasion. The strategic value of making the singing incidental to a general program is that thus the activity does not stand or fall by its success at any particular event. If the singing is to any degree pleasurable, the citizens are likely to say to themselves, "That was enjoyable—why not do it again?" When assembly singing has thus been introduced on two or three special occasions, it is time for a meeting organized specifically as a community sing. You must not suppose, however, that the innovation will be successful if you merely issue a general invitation for the public to attend. There is still many a person in the community who will ask "What is community singing?" Advance publicity in the newspapers should therefore contain an answer to that question. The newspaper articles might include interesting accounts of sings in other cities, endorsements of community singing by leading authorities and other material of that sort.

Choosing the Time for Sings

The time to be chosen for your demonstration sing depends upon your local conditions. Late on Sunday afternoon is a suitable hour in most cases, since it does not conflict with church services, and it finds the family united and free from household responsibilities. If Sunday afternoon is not suitable, choose a weekday night that conflicts the least with existing engagements—possibly Friday. For your place of meeting try to secure the town's best and largest auditorium, in case the sing is to be held during the indoor season. In the summer, select either a park bandstand where there is sufficient seating equipment or the steps of some public building which will make a good sounding board as well as an impressive setting.

Your director of singing is the most important essential in organizing the sing. Upon him devolves the task of creating enthusiasm for the singing idea. He must so magnetize the assemblage into a unified singing body that its members emerge from the hall with a pleased sense of their collective vocal prowess and with a desire to try the experience again. Above all he must be not merely a routined musician, but a real leader of men. He must have human sympathy that is based upon a true social vision. If his love for his fellows is spurious, that fact will soon be detected by his audience and he will have no permanent hold upon his public. As to musical qualifications, he should have a sufficient knowledge of music to direct singing, whether accompanied by piano, or by a

small orchestra or a band. He need not be a skilled singer himself, but he should have a strong enough voice to teach a new song to the crowd and to dominate the mass tone to a certain extent. The above represents the maximum of leadership ability, and the committee need not be discouraged if it has not such talent available at the start. It may frequently find a likely candidate whose abilities will mature with the progress of the movement.

Such a leader may well profit by a study of one or more books that tell of community song leadership and a conductor's technique in general: Among these books are the following:

"Community Music", a handbook; National Recreation Assn., New York City.

"Music for Everybody", by Marshall Bartholomew and Robert Lawrence; Abingdon Press, New York City.

"Essentials of Conducting", by Karl W. Gehrkens; Oliver Ditson Co., Boston.

"The Eloquent Baton", by Will Earhart; M. Witmark & Sons, New York City.

"Principles of Conducting", by Busch and McCray, H. T. FitzSimons Co., Chicago.

"The Technic of the Baton", by Albert Stoessel; Carl Fischer, Inc., New York City.

Not merely with a competent leader is the success of the singing assured. The leader is seriously handicapped without a satisfactory accompaniment. In a fairsized hall a grand piano, dynamically played, provides all support that is necessary. Indeed, it is never well to let an accompaniment drown out the singing of the crowd, since they will then lose the pleasure of listening to their joint body of tone. For a larger audience, indoors, a moderate-sized orchestra should make the singing more snappy. For the open air, a band gives the best background, but in lieu of such support, a cornet and piano will serve to set the pitch and keep the crowd together.

Hints to Accompanists

In the case of a piano accompanist, it is well to have one who can play most of the community songs from memory. If he does not have to look at the notes, he will be much more free to follow the time-beating of the leader and to listen for the sometimes capricious tempo of the crowd's singing. The accompanist must remember that the self-effacing type of accompaniment suitable with a solo will be inadequate as the support for the singing of the crowd. The volume should be in proportion to the large body of vocal tone and, above all, the pianist should mark out the rhythm emphatically. Indeed, in a community sing he represents the entire percussion section of the orchestra.

For the use of the accompanist the committee should provide itself with one or more loosely bound folios of the music that is habitually

used for the singing. Directions for making up such a folio can be obtained from this Bureau. It will include sheet music copies of copyrighted songs and books containing the older community songs. Among the popular-priced editions of the latter are the following:

Twice 55 Community Songs No. 1, the Brown Book; C. C. Birchard and Co., Boston.

Twice 55 Community Songs No. 2, the Green Book; C. C. Birchard and Co.

Golden Book of Favorite Songs; Hall & McCreary Company, Chicago.

Gray Book of Favorite Songs; Hall & McCreary Co.

Favorite Songs of the People; Theodore Presser Co., Philadelphia.

Everybody Sing Book; Paull-Pioneer Music Co., New York City.

Sociability Songs; Rodeheaver Co., Chicago.

Band or orchestra accompaniments for new popular songs used in community singing may be bought from their respective publishers. Arrangements of old-time community songs for band or orchestra may be purchased from C. C. Birchard and Co. and Hall & McCreary Co., at the above addresses.

Your equipment for the sing must also include some means of placing the words of the songs before the audience. You might use, first, one of the above books of community songs. That will not provide, however, the words of some of the best popular songs which you may decide to include in your program, especially as they will make a sympathetic contact with the younger members of your audience. For the words of these, you may wish to supply a special song sheet. Perhaps you can get a local newspaper to print such a sheet gratis or a department store or music merchant to provide it as a form of advertisement.

Song Permissions

If the words of copyrighted songs are used on this sheet, it is necessary to secure permission for such use from the publishers.

Information regarding already published word leaflets may be had from the National Bureau for the Advancement of Music.

Some community sing committees have found a way to provide for both those in the audience who can read music and for those who will merely sing in unison from the word sheet. This is done by the use both of a well prepared song sheet and one of the above music books which contain many of the same songs as those on the sheet. One community music association issued two versions of its song sheet—one with both music and words included. Suggestions for increasing the cultural effect of the sings through the above scheme may be obtained from this Bureau.

An almost hypnotic means of getting the words of the songs before the audience is through the use of stereopticon slides. When an audience sees the words of a song upon the screen, its mob psychology seems

to place it under a hypnosis that makes spontaneous singing almost inevitable. Furthermore, when the spectator looks up at the screen, his body is in a proper position for singing and he is enabled both to read the words and to watch the leading of the director who stands in the light reflected from the screen. For the use of slides it is necessary to have a stereopticon, or perhaps a motion picture machine, if the latter has a slide carrier and a stereopticon lens. Mica or glass slides of old and new songs may be purchased from various firms. From some such sources you may obtain typewriter slide mats for making your own slides. Directions concerning the latter may be obtained from this Bureau, as may data as to the firms which manufacture song slides.

If the sing is scheduled for Sunday afternoon, a program may be devised which will partake of the spiritual nature of the day and yet will be, in so far as possible, non-sectarian. The latter point will be governed by local conditions, but, susceptible to such variations, some such program as the following may be outlined:

1. (a) Doxology
(b) Lord's Prayer (Unison)
(c) America (Everybody)
2. Instrumental Number
(Where there is no band or orchestra, a cornet or violin solo to piano accompaniment or some such feature will be effective.)
3. Community Songs
(a) There's a Long, Long Trail
(b) America the Beautiful
(First, second, and fourth verses)
4. Vocal Solo
(Preferably local talent)
5. Community Songs
(a) A Merry Life (or some other light song)
(b) Old Folks at Home
6. Ensemble Number
(This number may be by a quartet, a high school orchestra, a children's chorus from one of the grade schools, or other like group)
7. Current Popular Songs (optional)
(To be chosen)
8. Instrumental Selection or Vocal Solo
9. A Surprise Feature
(It is an excellent plan to have one surprise feature on the first program and at other meetings thereafter. The nature of it should not be divulged in the advance notices. On one occasion the surprise may be in charge of the supervisor of music in the public schools; on another, a church choir, or music club, etc.)
10. (a) A Hymn
(One of general appeal)
(b) Old Black Joe
(Sung by everybody)
11. A Patriotic Climax
(a) Battle Hymn of the Republic
(Suggestion: One verse and three choruses sung with a patrol effect as if by a body of marchers—that is, increasing the volume gradually as the marchers draw near and reaching a crescendo at the end.)

- (b) An American's Creed
(To be read in unison by those assembled, from the words in the program or on the screen.)
- (c) The Star-Spangled Banner.
(Sung at attention in order to show respect to our national anthem.)

We will now assume that your demonstration sing has passed off happily, and that a certain portion of the public has shown a desire that the sings be made a fixture. If your committee has been selected in advance of the initial sing you will probably add to it certain influential persons whose interest has been won as a result of the demonstration. If the committee had not yet been appointed it would be expedient to have a good speaker make a three-minute talk just before the end of the demonstration sing, summing up the pleasure of the audience and suggesting that a meeting be called to organize the sings on a permanent basis.

The sponsors of the movement should be ready with a suggested date for the meeting and with a pre-arranged plan of action thereat, in order that the organization might be effected without a tactical mishap. Especially, the choice of officers and executive committee should be left to the judgment of a nominating committee (the personnel of which might be decided in advance) and not subject to the vote of a subsequent meeting. In other words a bit of benevolent pre-arrangement should make sure that the management of the campaign shall be entrusted to a group of interested persons who will work together as a team.

Choice of a Name

Local conditions may determine the choice of a name for your organization. It may well be called the Community Music Association, which gives latitude for a logical extending of the program beyond the mere community sings. Or if a more elastic form of organization is preferred, it may be called simply the Community Music Committee. This name is less fortunate in one respect. It is not so well suited to the scheme of individual memberships such as may be instituted in the case of an association. These memberships at, say, one dollar per year will not only provide a nucleus for the needed funds but will make the public at large feel that they are a natural part of the enterprise. If a membership plan is adopted, have pledge cards circulated at the association meeting so as to assure as many members as possible right at the start. These and other details of organization should be incorporated in a set of by-laws which should be ready for adoption at the organization meeting. Suggestions as to such by-laws may be had from this Bureau.

Your organization now being effected, the executive committee should decide upon some schedule for holding public sings at regular intervals.

If once a week seems too frequent, they should be at least semi-monthly or monthly. The latter interval, however, is generally too long since it is important that the sings be regarded as a regular habit. The matter of a suitable time has already been discussed. In towns where there is a "blue law" Sabbath, the Sunday afternoon sing is an especial godsend, for it gives the public a wholesome and uplifting type of recreation, the nature of which can scarcely be questioned. If this time is chosen, you might well have clergymen of various faiths pronounce an invocation at the meetings now and then.

If your sings are to penetrate the civic consciousness of the people, you must secure for them the widest sort of publicity. See to it that the editorial writers of the local papers are provided with material on the philosophy underlying community singing and the community music movement. Ask them to prepare editorials and articles embodying such material and to run these just previous to the various meetings. Have a competent person to prepare your regular announcement articles, preferably a volunteer. However, it may possibly be necessary to set aside some of the association funds for his part-time salary. Utilize every avenue of publicity. If the meeting place is reached by a trolley line, prepare posters announcing the sings and ask the traction company to display them on its cars. Above all, use the word-of-mouth publicity, which is the most valuable. Ask those who attend the sings to bring in new members or at least visitors.

Meeting the Expense

See to it that the civic nature of the enterprise is so clearly evident as to justify its receiving an appropriation from the municipality and contributions from civic clubs or individuals. Such moneys will be the more readily forthcoming if the sings are conducted on the most economical basis and if those who actually attend them bear some of the burden of their support. For the latter purpose you might institute a free-will offering at the sings. However, the expense of running the campaign should be slight inasmuch as it is based so largely upon volunteer effort. You also should secure, if possible, some civic auditorium for which you will have to pay no more than the expenses of light, heat and attendants. In that case your expenditures will chiefly be for the printing of song sheets and programs and for the purchase of music and other supplies.

If you are to make the series of sings permanent, your committee must exercise the utmost ingenuity lest the public fall away after the novelty of the experience has worn off. To this end, not only must your song leader introduce constantly fresh material and treatment of the songs, but your program committee must be ready each time with one or more addi-

tional attractions such as those enumerated in the specimen program above. Now and then you might even introduce a brief, snappy talk on some non-partisan matter of civic interest. You must be careful in the choice of these, however, lest your sings become a medium for exploiting the pet hobbies of various groups.

Your sings will retain a firmer grip upon the public if their inspirational and patriotic side is constantly emphasized. Patriotic airs should never be absent from the program. The leader, with a word or two here and there, should strive to create a friendlier community spirit as a result of the sings. Songs symbolizing brotherhood should be introduced frequently. In other words, the sings should have not only their moments of fun, but moments of emotional exaltation such as will make them an instrument of civic betterment.

The educational influence of the sings will be heightened if your leader dwells not only upon the musical content of the songs, but upon their textual significance and history. The latter can be brought forth through spoken introductions for which you may find data in a pamphlet, "Stories of America's Songs", to be obtained from the National Bureau. These stories are based upon a list of twenty American songs suitable for community singing. The twenty songs would make an appropriate start for your community sing repertoire.

Technical problems such as may trouble your director are answered, in many cases, in the above mentioned handbook, "Community Music". One frequent problem is, "What shall we do when the singing is sluggish?" One or both of two methods may be used. First, try the crowd out on a stunt song, utilizing devices such as are described in the above handbook. Also, try the audience on a round, examples of which are found in various community song books—for instance, such rounds as "Row, Row Your Boat," "Are You Sleeping?" and "Lovely Evening." The dividing of the entire group into sections for these rounds will start a spirit of competition that should arouse adults as well as children. A similar spirit may be engendered with a song combat. Have one-half the group sing "There's a Long, Long Trail" while the others sing "Keep the Home Fires Burning." Numerous play songs are found in "Twice 55 Games with Music," C. C. Birchard & Company, and in the above mentioned "Everybody Sing Book".

Training New Leaders

When once you have made the general mass sings a fixture, your association should bring about the extension of community singing throughout the town among individual groups in churches, clubs, fac-

tories, stores, etc. If any one group has not a competent leader of singing, the association should be ready to provide one. Inaugurate a free training school for volunteer song leaders to which you will invite the different groups to send candidates. The general instruction at the school will be in the broad routine of time-beating as applied to community singing. This instruction may be given by your song leader or by some other musician who is qualified for the task. The leaders thus trained should be ready not only to direct the singing among their respective groups, but also to render a similar volunteer service elsewhere at the request of the association. The morale of these volunteers will be heightened if they are banded together in a song leaders' association or club which is affiliated with the general association and subject to its decisions in all large matters. The club may have periodical meetings at which new songs and stunts are tried out.

Out of the small group sings there should grow intensive units such as small choruses, instrumental ensembles, production of operettas, cantatas, etc. The direction of these intensive outgrowths should provide part-time employment for some of the town's professional musicians. These separate units will feed into the series of public sings, providing extra features and even combining for some big program.

Neighborhood singing may be fostered by your instituting a series of "movable" sings in the various sections of the city. While there are simpler ways of doing this, the ideal way is with a "music car" or truck which functions as an itinerant bandstand. These have been introduced in Baltimore and Philadelphia, and data about them is obtainable from the Bureau.

Genesis of a Community Chorus

Intensive developments among neighborhoods and units should be matched by an even more ambitious outgrowth of the main sings—namely, a community choral society. After the public has enjoyed for some time the miscellaneous unison singing or even desultory part-singing amid a general audience, many persons are liable to grow weary of well doing without some higher musical objective. Such people will form the nucleus of a community chorus which will be carried on as an adjunct to the community sings. It may be organized in one of two forms. If a city is a fairly large one and community singing is being carried on with good-sized crowds in a number of units, each of the latter may contribute a group of advanced singers to a general community chorus. A complete outline of directions for organizing such a composite chorus may be had from this Bureau. The form of organization, however, better adapted to the average community is one central chorus

made up of advanced singers who attend the community sings and of other singers throughout the community whose interest may be enlisted by the committee. Such a community chorus must first of all be thoroughly democratic. It is a chorus of the people, regardless of musical training or vocal attainments. A call for members should be issued without any such stipulations as to training. There will probably be no voice trials; the individual can usually determine his own fitness for membership. Experience has shown that those who are unable to keep up the pace generally drop out automatically. Nevertheless it is desirable that as many experienced singers be enrolled as possible in order that there may be a solid foundation to spur on the new-fledged choristers.

Selecting a Conductor

For the conductor of the community chorus the leader of the general sings may sometimes be chosen. However, this task should be entrusted to the city's best choral director, providing that he combines with his technical training the knack of getting a good response out of volunteer choristers upon whom there is no compulsion excepting their own interest. Sometimes the music supervisor in the public schools is the most likely candidate, or one of the church organists. Though such a musician may not have had experience in directing adult mixed-voice groups, he may fortify his equipment by a close study of various books. A large number of these are listed in a bibliography of "Books on Vocal Music" obtainable from the National Bureau. Moreover, the association should see to it that the person chosen as choral conductor shall receive whatever additional training may be necessary, just as a school board would arrange to have its music supervisor perfect his pedagogic equipment. Best of all, the association might arrange to have the director-elect receive special instruction in conducting such as is given at certain universities.

Choice of Repertoire

For its initial repertoire the chorus may utilize one of the above listed community song books, choosing some of the simpler folk songs as a starter. Some of these books include advanced choral numbers which will help the chorus through the earlier part of its career before it is ready to tackle an oratorio or cantata. Material from such books, however, should be supplemented by music for mixed voices in octavo form.

In keeping the chorus on its mettle, the chorus officers should utilize every device for assuring promptness and regularity of attendance. A valuable feature particularly for its psychological value, is the membership card. It is the one way in which every member may be checked. Each person who accepts a card should feel that he automatically pledges

service thereby. In fact, it may be wise to place a specific pledge of service on the reverse side of the card. On its face the card should include spaces for the member's name, his address, telephone number, voice, group affiliation, the date of his joining the chorus and miscellaneous remarks. The card should be countersigned by the conductor or some other officer of the chorus. The membership card should be presented to the chorus secretary at each rehearsal or public appearance and the member's presence should then be checked. To all persons absent from any given meeting a note of reminder should be sent by the secretary, calling attention to the date of the next meeting.

One chorus raised its attendance record by dividing the entire group into squads starting at five members each. The officers selected a number of squad leaders by going through the membership cards and picking out the strongest people. These squad leaders were asked to remain after one rehearsal and each to pick out four names from the list of members. These four together with the leader and any new member or members that he might bring in would constitute the squad. Each squad leader was responsible for the attendance each week of his own group of from five to eight singers.

A natural way of maintaining chorus morale is to have a group leader responsible for each section—with a mixed chorus, one each for the sopranos, the altos, the tenors and the basses.

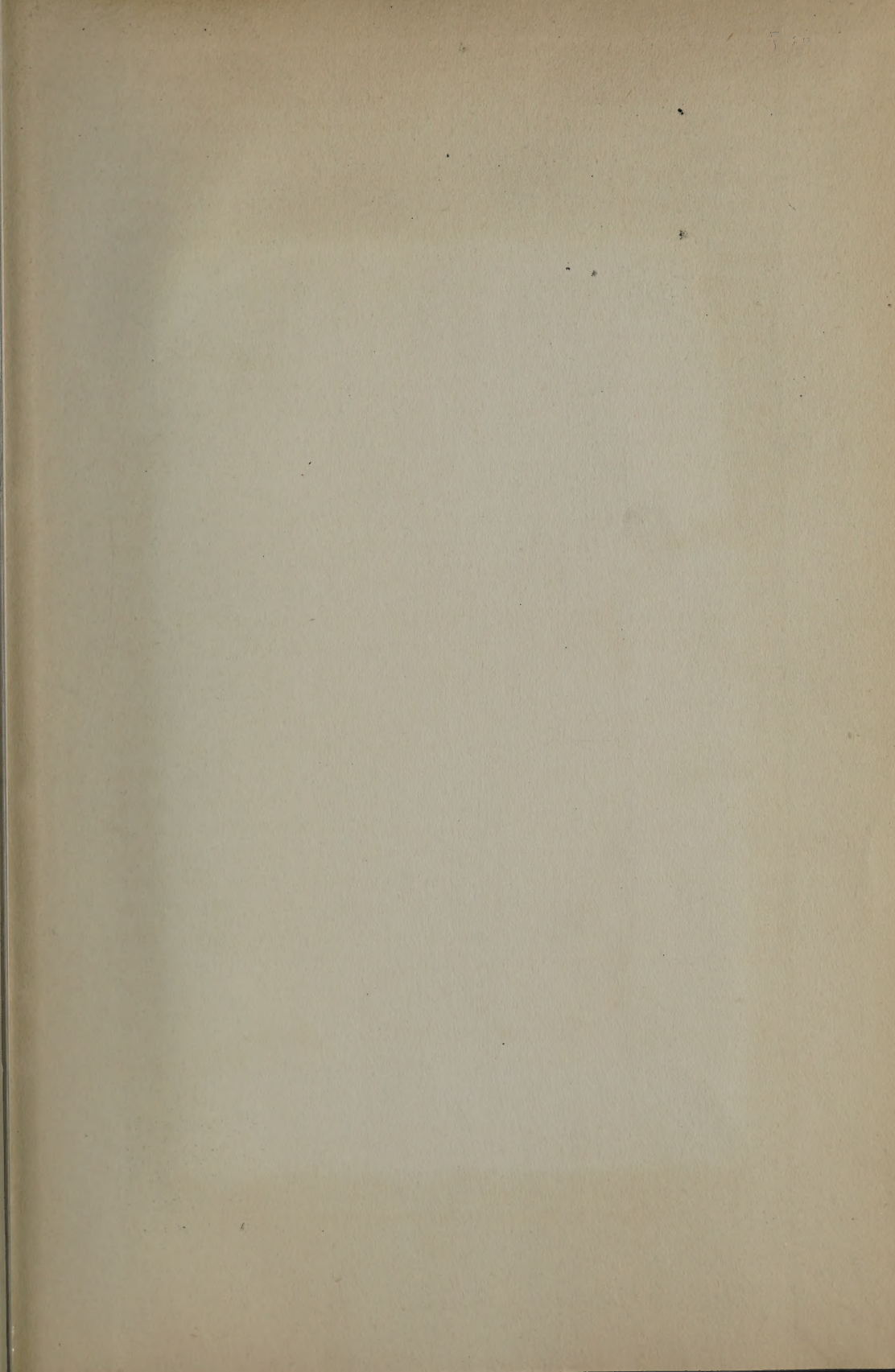
We have now traced the development from the demonstration sing to the community choral society. For the latter, providing that it has an efficient director, there are virtually no limits to what it may accomplish within the bounds set by its individual vocal material and training. Indeed the chorus is almost the only form of art in which an artist, as conductor, can take individual material of only average worth and weld it into a finished product that glows with real beauty. With such leadership, our chorus, after it has finished its apprenticeship of shorter numbers and cantatas, should be able to negotiate "The Messiah" and other masterpieces with entire credit to all concerned

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OTHER MATERIAL ON GROUP SINGING:

(A single copy obtainable free from National Bureau for Advancement of Music.)

Stories of America's Songs
First Steps in Community Singing
Twenty Points for Song Leaders
Camp Songs (word leaflet)
Books on Vocal Music
Training the National High School Chorus.



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